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ABSTRACT

The Language Play Method (LPM), a teaching method developed to systematically instruct preschool children in the structure of Japanese and Hiragana letters, is described in this paper. LPM develops three fundamental abilities which contribute to oral skill and literacy in kindergartners: the ability to recognize letters, the ability to decode written sentences, and the ability to discriminate syllables and letter shapes in language games. Twelve kinds of teaching aids are used in LPM to develop these abilities: picture cards, letter cards, figure cards, goods cards, wall pictures, personal belongings cards, dice, cards for dice, logic blocks, divided shape-blocks, a wooden doll, and magnetic buttons. Fifty games which use these aids are listed, including sound games, semantic games, sentence games, and letter games. Each game serves as a basis for the successful execution of the games succeeding it. (LJR)

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"ORTHOGRAPHY AND LEARNING TO DECODE IN JAPANESE".

Meeting: "THE ROLE OF DECODING PATTERNS IN INITIAL READING".

At the 5th IRA Congress on Reading, in Vienna, at the meeting of "Perspective on Early Reading", S. Muraishi presented a paper on orthography and reading, especially the reading ability of pre-school children in Japan (2). An abstract from the paper is cited below:
In November, 1967, S. Muraishi and K. Amano researched the ability of reading Hiragana letters in 2217 pre-school children in Japan (3).

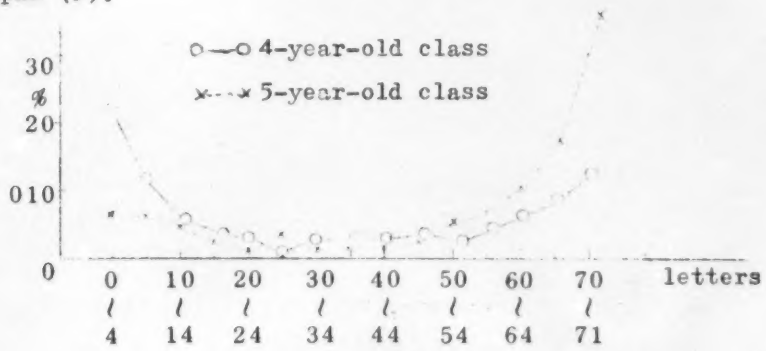

Fig. 1 Number of acquired Hiragana letters in pre-school children

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In Fig. 1, it was found that only 5.2% of the children in the 5 year old class could read fewer than 4 letters. On the other hand, 63.1% of the children in the 5 year old class could read 60 or more letters. Then, in a re-test of children in large and middle-size cities, a month before entering primary school, 87.9% of the 5 year old class could read 60 or more Hiragana letters. For your information, Hiragana letters contain 71 symbols.

あ a	い i	う u	え e	お o
か ka	き ki	く ku	け ke	こ ko
さ sa	し shi	す su	せ se	そ so
た ta	ち chi	つ tu	て te	と to
な na	に ni	ぬ nu	ね ne	の no
は ha	ひ hi	ふ hu	へ he	ほ ho
ま ma	み mi	む mu	め me	も mo
や ya		ゆ yu		よ yo
ら ra	り ri	る ru	れ re	ろ ro
わ wa	を wo	ん n		

が ga	ぎ gi	ぐ gu	げ ge	ご go
ざ za	じ zi	ず zu	ぜ ze	ぞ zo
だ da	ぢ zi	づ zu	で de	ど do
ば ba	び bi	ぶ bu	べ be	ぼ bo
ぱ pa	ぴ pi	ぷ pu	ぺ pe	ぽ po

It was concluded, therefore, that most children in the 5 year old class could read most of the Hiragana letters before entering primary school. By the way, though the children who could read 60 or more letters could read simple sentences, most of them could read the words merely letter by letter.

But this does not indicate an out-of-norm development of reading ability in pre-school children but is caused by the orthographical fact that Hiragana letters are syllabic.

Therefore, this improvement in the rate of reading Hiragana letters by modern pre-school children is not the result of teaching Hiragana but of teaching the fundamental ability to gain interest in letters by the parent and the kindergartner. What fundamental ability is needed to acquire an interest in letters? There seem to be three fundamental abilities. The first is the ability to recognize letters. This is acquired through learning the role of signals and signs in daily living. The second is the ability to decode written sentences. This is acquired by learning to respond to the meanings of written sentences in picture books, although the child is as yet illiterate. The third is the ability to discriminate syllables and letter shapes in language games. In addition to these three abilities, it is necessary that the children should have attained a certain level of intellectual and language development.

I would like to explain, therefore, the Language Play Method (L.P.M.) devised and developed for pre-school children by S. Muraishi and others, in 1973 (1). L.P.M. is a teaching method to instruct the children systematically in the structure of Japanese and Hiragana letters, using 12 kinds of teaching aids. In this way, pre-school children taught by L.P.M. acquire the fundamental abilities of oracy and literacy.

L.P.M. contains 50 kinds of games and these can be broadly divided into sound games, semantic games, sentence games and letter games. Now, I would like to introduce the 50 L.P.M. games and their aims:

The kinds and aims of language games:

A. Games teaching the sound construction of words.

1. Tongue twisters – (to teach fluent pronounciation)
2. Accent games – (to teach accent)
3. A-I-U-E-O song – (to teach 50 sounds)
4. How many syllables – (to teach word division into syllables)
5. Collecting words with the same first syllable – (to teach abstraction of the first syllable)
6. Collecting words with the same last syllable – (to teach abstraction of the last syllable)
7. Capping game – (to teach how to distinguish first-last syllables of words)
8. Pronouncing words conversely game – (to teach the syllable construction of words)

B. Games teaching the semantic construction of words:

9. Sound game – (to teach onomatopoeic words)
10. Refraining word game – (to teach the mimetic words)
11. Collecting same colours – (to teach to distinguish colours)
12. Collecting same shapes – (to teach to distinguish shapes)
13. Collecting words containing the letter TE (Hand) – (to teach compound name words)
14. Collecting words using hands – (to teach action words)
15. Collecting words containing the word KAERU (Change, Return) – (to teach compound action-phenomenon words)

16. Collecting words belonging to "I" - (to teach attributes)

17. Collecting negative words - (to teach negative forms)

18. Finding opposite words - (to teach opposite relation of words)

19. Up-up game - (to teach multivocal words)

20. Locating game - (to teach locating words)

21. What's one's pair - (to teach twin things)

22. What's one's companion - (to teach cooperative function between things)

23. Comparing game - (to teach one's characteristics)

24. Shopping game - (to teach upper and lower concepts)

25. Collecting companion words - (to teach categories)

26. How many, how much game - (to teach auxiliary numerals)

27. Who am I - (to teach person's characteristics)

28. Riddle game - (to teach guess things)

29. Chaining word to word game - (to teach attributes)

C. Games teaching the syntactic and semantic construction of sentences.

30. "That is to say" game - (to teach style)

31. Finding need words - (to teach subject - predicate)

32. Te-Ni-Wo-Ha game - (to teach particles)

33. Changing words game - (to teach word-order)

34. Changing voice game - (to teach active-passive voice)

35. Imitation chanting game - (to teach compound sentences)

36. Verbal message game - (to teach syntax and semantics)

37. Adding to the story game - (to teach continuity of a story and to raise creative thinking)

38. Story making game - (to teach syntax and to raise creative thinking)

39. Connecting words game - (to teach conjunctions etc)

D. Games teaching construction of letters.

40. Figure drawing game - (to teach how to recognize shapes)

41. Co-ordinating picture drawing with rhymes or songs - (to raise motor function and interest in expression expression)

42. One stroke drawing game - (to teach continuity of line and to raise motor function)

43. Drawing lines game - (to raise motor function and to teach writing order)

44. Finding letters games - (to teach correspondence between letters and syllables)

45. Finding wrong letters - (to teach correct letter-forms)

46. Finding similar letters - (to teach recongnition of distinctive features)

47. Word making game - (to teach how to create words by combining letters)

48. Large letter versus small letter game - (to teach special syllabic letters)

49. Sentence filling game - (to teach written composition)

50. Sentence writing game - (to teach composition and creative expression)

The characteristics of L.P.M.

Some of the characteristic features of the L.P.M. are as follows.

1. There are 12 kinds of teaching aids in L.P.M.
   a) Picture cards
   b) Letter cards
   c) Figure cards
   d) Goods cards
   e) Wall-pictures
   f) Personal belongings cards
   g) Dice
   h) Cards for dice
   i) Logic blocks
   j) Divided shape-blocks
   k) A wooden doll
   l) Magnetic buttons.

2. L.P.M. is a method designed to teach the structure of Japanese and Hiragana letters. According to S. Muraishi, there are three dimensions of language education. The first is the usage of and response to the words as spoken or heard by the child; the second is instruction aimed at raising the language activities; and the third is instruction in the structure of language and Hiragana letters. So, L.P.M., aimed at the third, is not just a simple game but a method of teaching, emphasizing intellectual and linguistic development.

3. In every L.P.M. game, the suitable age and the optimum age are indicated. The suitable age range of L.P.M. is from 3 years old to 6 years old. As for example, in No. 7,

"Capping game", the suitable age range is from 4 years to 6 years old, and the optimum age is 5 years. In No. 28, "Riddle game", the suitable age range is from 3 to 6 years old, and the optimum age is 4 years.

4. In every game of the L.P.M., the stages from step 3 to step 6 are indicated. Let me explain No. 8, "Pronouncing words conversely game" as an example :

Step 1. To pronounce conversely the word on a picture card (for example : ba-na-na; na-na-ba.)

Step 2. To find picture cards corresponding to the word changed by converse pronounciation.
(for instance : ka-ba (hippopotamus);
ba-ka (foolish))

Step 3. To pronounce conversely own name and names of friends.

Step 4. To find the words in constant syllabic order in converse pronounciation
(for example : to-ma-to (tomato)).

Then, at the developmental procedure, rapid converse pronounciation play often takes place.

5. In the L.P.M., the 50 games are ordered systematically. For example, you can see the game order by looking at progression from No.4, "How many syllables", to No.5, "Collecting words with the same first syllable", to No.6, "Collecting words with the same last syllable", to No.7, "Capping game", etc. In this way each preceding game serves as a basis for the systematic and successful execution of the successive games. According to the above example,

children who have reached game No.7 are considered as having acquired one of the fundamental abilities of literacy. As stated above, L.P.M. is a method to make pre-school children acquire the fundamental abilities of oracy and literacy.

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